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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 000260

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SUBJECT: UN/Donor/GOZ Meeting on the Zimbabwe Food
Crisis

REF: Harare 217

Summary: The US Ambassador and Acting USAID Director attended a recent UN-hosted meeting between foreign diplomats/donors and GOZ ministers to discuss the food situation in Zimbabwe. The primary topic was the role of the GOZ in acquiring and distributing the staple food, maize, in the coming months. So far the GOZ claims to have imported about 686,000 MT of maize. For the next hunger season (May 2003 - April 2004) the GOZ expects a harvest of about 571,000 MT and to import another 230,000 MT for a total stock of about 802,000 MT verses a demand of nearly 1.9 million MT. The GOZ expects the resulting deficit of about 1.1 million MT to be covered by a winter crop, additional GOZ imports, and donor contributions. The GOZ also expressed a willingness to consider wheat monetization. Both the GOZ and WFP discussed constraints to importing additional food.

In addition, the GOZ discussed the current livestock situation ("critical") and an up-coming nationwide health/nutritional survey sponsored by the GOZ, WHO and UNICEF. End Summary.

1. On 27 January 2003, US Ambassador Sullivan and Acting USAID Director attended a periodic meeting organized by the UN for diplomats to discuss issues related to the humanitarian crisis with cabinet level representatives of the GOZ. While most embassies were represented by ambassadors/high commissioners, only the Minister of Health (MoH), the Minister of Small Enterprise Development (MoSME), the Deputy Minister for Education, the Director of Veterinary and Livestock Services at the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), and an Office Director from the Ministry of Public Service, Labor, and Social Welfare (MoPSLSW) (Mr. Mitzi) were present for the GOZ. The UN Humanitarian Coordinator (UNHC) opened the meeting with a review of the visit and discussions of UN Special Envoy for the humanitarian crisis, James Morris. (See REFTEL)

2. The EU Ambassador opened the discussion from the floor by suggesting that it is now necessary to "fast-track" a food monetization program for Zimbabwe. The Minister of Health responded that the GOZ would welcome a written proposal. The Ambassador also repeated an earlier request for a written explanation of the role of the Grain Marketing Board (GMB) in providing food during the current crisis. Mr. Mitzi stated that such a document is being prepared. The SME Minister also noted the need for transparency of the GMB.

3. Mr. Mitzi then provided information on food imports by the GOZ as follows:

- Total maize imported February through mid-December 2002: 685,784 MT (the EU requested figures for the last 6 weeks as well).
- GOZ estimate of 2002/3 maize harvest: 571,347 MT, of which 56,335 MT will be turned over to GMB (Comment: we presume that the rest will be grown at subsistence level on communal farms and therefore not enter the market).
- In addition to the harvest, GOZ expects GMB to have 230,965 MT on hand (Comment: this is actually planned imports).
- Therefore, GOZ expects to have a total national maize stock for the period July 2003-June 2004 of 802,312 MT against a total consumption need (human and livestock) of 1,895,843 MT. This means a GOZ planned deficit of 1,093,531 MT for 2003/4 which is to be met from "winter cropping, government imports, and humanitarian aid."

14. WFP noted that it will cost approximately US\$300 million to meet a 1,000,000 MT deficit.

15. The MoPSLSW recognizes the following constraints in meeting the country's maize requirements:

- foreign currency shortage;
- the regional drought is causing congestion in the supply routes;
- congestion at the Beitbridge border post;
- a critical shortage of locomotives;
- insufficient forex to bid on land transport vehicles (regionally); and
- shortage of smaller trucks for the GMB to deliver food within the country.

Donors also asked for similar information on other commodities (e.g., wheat, beans, etc.).

16. WFP made the following comments about its program:

- WFP is bringing in 2,500-3,000 MT per day;
- import permit problems are improving;
- WFP is developing a contingency stock of fuel;
- the WFP pipeline will dry up sometime between March and April 2003; and
- availability of South African rail cars is becoming a serious constraint.

17. A representative from the MOH briefed the group on the up-coming UNICEF/WHO/GOZ nutrition survey of children under 60 months. This survey is to follow up on an assessment done in May 2002. It will include all districts in both rural and urban areas. It will look at wasting, stunting, underweight, vitamin A, feeding patterns of orphans, common childhood illnesses, mortality, and supplemental feeding. Training is going on now, and field work is expected to be completed late February with a first draft planned for early March.

18. The MOA representative reported on the livestock situation as follows:

- The current drought is having a major impact - over 20,000 animals have been reported to have died between October 2002 and January 2003 in Matabeleland Province alone (the actual number is probably much higher).
- Stock feed supply is critical, which is also severely impacting on the dairy, pig, and poultry industries.
- Foot-and-Mouth disease is getting worse. Note: He blamed this on the regional nature of the crisis - the crisis in Botswana could have been prevented if Botswana had bought vaccines for Zimbabwe back in October 2002 when the problem began - and on the lack of forex to buy vaccines.
- While the number of dairy farms has decreased by 20-25% (due to the resettlement program) the national dairy herd has remained about the same size as cows are transferred between farms, but milk production has decreased (current demand is 13 million liters while production is only 7-8 million liters per month).

Comment: The meeting produced some good information from the government, for a change; but still not enough. Despite improvements in current WFP operations, the GOZ projections paint a fairly bleak picture regarding future humanitarian assistance prospects in Zimbabwe, indicating that the magnitude of the crisis is not likely to abate soon, and that continued substantial humanitarian assistance - similar to or more than last year's levels -- will likely be required over the coming year. SULLIVAN